

COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
LAND USE AND ENVIRONMENT GROUP



ROADMAP

OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL
AND CLIMATE JUSTICE



INTRODUCTION

Everyone in the San Diego region is affected by climate change, from extreme weather to sea-level rise, to extended drought and wildfire seasons. But not everyone is affected equally.

Climate change has differing social, economic, public health and other adverse impacts on underserved populations. As the region establishes adaptation strategies that will affect development, transportation, mobility, energy, and water efficiency, it is important that these changes and strategies do not disproportionately affect historically marginalized or underserved communities. The County is developing a regional framework to develop science-based pathways to reach zero carbon emissions and identify local policy opportunities to address regional inequities. Moreover, the climate action planning efforts recognize the co-benefits of improved air quality for historically burdened communities.

In May 2021, the County of San Diego Board of Supervisors directed the establishment of the Office of Environmental and Climate Justice (OECJ) within the Land Use and Environment Group (LUEG). The OECJ will lead the County of San Diego's effort to reduce community exposures to health hazards as a uniquely positioned entity with a geographic scope that includes environmental and climate justice issues in the unincorporated areas of the county, as well as the incorporated cities throughout the region. The purpose of the OECJ is to ensure these efforts will address equity, environmental and climate justice in communities disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens and related health problems both inside the home and in the neighborhood.

The OECJ will help focus neighboring jurisdictions and regulatory entities to remedy environmental disparities and injustices related to issues such as stationary and mobile sources of air pollution, toxic hotspots, greenhouse gas emissions, the urban heat island effect, substandard housing, a lack of access to healthy food, lack of transportation options, poor quality neighborhood infrastructure, such as broadband and connectivity, and a historic deficiency in open space and recreational amenities.

Environmental Justice (EJ) communities as defined by the State of California refers to “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”



Historically, public and private decisions over waste disposal sites, heavy manufacturing facilities and toxics-releasing industrial uses, as well as trade corridors and truck routes have disproportionately impacted low-income communities of color. This in turn degrades the quality of life in these areas and exposes local residents to greater risks of health impacts stemming from pollution and other environmental hazards. The founding principle of OECJ is to ensure that these injustices do not occur in the future, through transparency of public health impacts of project permitting decisions, meaningful engagement of communities throughout the San Diego region on the intersections between land use, transportation, housing, racial discrimination, and environmental hazards, as well as nurturing institutional discipline among all agencies involved in long-range planning decisions to prevent concentration of environmental burdens for future generations.

The founding principle of OECJ is to address past and present injustices, and to ensure that these injustices do not occur in the future.

The OECJ acknowledges the harmony that existed between the land, nature and its original peoples, who have since endured displacement, persecution, and systemic oppression. The Office pays its respect to the unceded territory and homelands of the 17 tribal nations in our region – the most in any county in the United States, from four cultural groups, the Kumeyaay/Diegueno, the Luiseño, the Cupeño, and the Cahuilla. As climate change increasingly threatens the region, its peoples, and its cultural identities, we aspire to learn from indigenous traditional knowledge in undoing the injustices of the past.

This OECJ Roadmap represents the initiation of this regional effort by summarizing early community engagement efforts to further define the roles and functions of this office. This document also outlines implementation steps for initiating the OECJ as an office and beginning its first year of work in addressing equity, environmental, and climate justice, and in supporting communities disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens and related health problems.



LISTENING TO THE COMMUNITY EARLY ENGAGEMENT

In October 2021, LUEG initiated community engagement efforts to inform further development of the overall scope, roles, and responsibilities of the OECJ. These efforts provided an opportunity for the community to provide their ideas and perspectives about how the OECJ can implement the Board's direction. Early engagement involved a two-pronged approach: 1.) region-wide public workshops, and 2.) focus groups with key stakeholders with experience and vested interests in EJ communities.

Approximately sixty (60) community members attended the public workshops. For the focus groups, project team members invited known organizations, stakeholders, and key members of the community in areas most impacted by environmental hazards in the San Diego region. These participants generally represented specific environmental and climate issues and topics, cultural/ethnic/racial groups, sectors of the economy, and similar interests. Approximately thirty (30) stakeholders and community members participated across the four (4) focus groups. All workshops and focus groups occurred via Zoom videoconference and were conducted in English language with simultaneous translation in Spanish language. Additional language assistance was available upon request.

During November-December 2021 there was consultation with the tribes to get their input. This outreach will continue through a tribal liaison at the County who will coordinate with the OECJ.



Project team members from LUEG conducted the focus groups. Each session began with welcoming remarks, followed by an overview of the goals and direction from the Board of Supervisors for establishing the OECJ. Most of the time for the workshops (120 minutes) and focus groups (90 minutes) was set aside for discussion, where participants asked questions and answered the project team's questions related to the scope and direction in establishing the OECJ.

The questions posed by the project team included the following:

- 1. Do you have any clarifying questions about the Board of Supervisors' direction regarding establishment of this new office?**
- 2. How would you describe the primary mission for this office in one sentence?**
- 3. What are specific ways that this office could be helpful in organizing and collaborating efforts in environmental justice and climate justice?**
- 4. What organizations in our region may be helpful to this new office in identifying community engagement priorities?**
- 5. Are there locations, communities, or stakeholders in the San Diego region that would benefit from capacity-building to strengthen their involvement?**



KEY FINDINGS FROM EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The findings from these early engagement activities inform this Roadmap. A separate, detailed summary report of the activities includes the findings, key themes, and detailed discussion points from these activities is available upon request from LUEG.

Prioritize Collaboration and Outreach in EJ Communities

OECJ should be a strong advocacy body and collaborate with other organizations, movements, and community members already working to address environmental justice issues in impacted communities. This should include meeting with communities with the greatest pollution burdens and environmental hazards in their own locations to fully understand their needs, and ensuring that these communities have access to meaningful support systems and resources. Collaboration with County departments and other public agencies and jurisdictions should focus on reducing duplication and strengthening mutually-supportive efforts.

Develop Partnerships and Opportunities within EJ Communities

Facilitating hands-on, direct, and meaningful involvement in environmental and climate issues in impacted communities among community-based organizations and community members as part of reducing environmental and climate impacts and burdens in those communities should be a major role of OECJ. This can include building capacity among advocacy groups and community members to strengthen their involvement in planning and decision making processes. Additionally, encouraging local hiring within impacted communities can ensure community members have job opportunities that contribute to improving environmental and climate issues. Similarly, OECJ should prioritize hiring team members who have lived experience or direct involvement with EJ communities.

Maintain a Broad Scope and Role

While focusing on collaboration, outreach, and partnerships are important roles, the OECJ can also maintain a broader scope and role. Specific examples include addressing needs in unincorporated and incorporated areas of the County, and assisting in making connections and finding solutions among inter-related issue areas that go beyond land-use. Additionally, some environmental and climate goals can have negative impacts on EJ communities (e.g., shifting from a gas to electric-based economy) due to access, resource and infrastructure constraints. The OECJ should be at the forefront in supporting innovative solutions and ideas, such as: youth opportunity passes for public transit, community gardens to increase access to healthy foods, and green careers in EJ communities.



Facilitate Partnerships to Identify Community Engagement Priorities

Many organizations and sectors within the region can assist OECJ in identifying the most pressing community needs and priorities. For example, among public and governmental agencies, the OECJ can facilitate identifying specific issues, needs, and communities that County government may be uniquely positioned to address. Also, regional economic development councils can collaborate in identifying economic development opportunities that can contribute to solving environmental burdens and hazards in EJ communities. Close engagement with each District Office of the Board of Supervisors and the many nonprofits, community-based, and service organizations will help OECJ to leverage trusted networks among EJ communities.

Building Capacity Across the Region

The OECJ can support capacity-building in environmental and climate justice across the region in many ways. These can include building coalitions, convening individual contributors and volunteers, and surveying the community on specific needs, issues, and projects in collaboration with community organizations and supportive resources. Such efforts may be most critical in locations that experience environmental burdens and pollution but are not identified as EJ communities under the CalEnviroScreen methodology (e.g., San Ysidro, Otay, and rural agricultural communities). Emergency and contingency planning in EJ communities in preparation for environmental and climate disasters (e.g., wildfire; earthquake; flood) are another important topic area.



MISSION, ROLES, AND FUNCTIONS

Overall, the role of the OECJ is to ensure that the County government is advancing multiple efforts in meaningful and collaborative ways to address equity, environmental and climate justice, and to support communities disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens and related health problems. The OECJ will ensure that the County government's efforts in reducing greenhouse gas emission and addressing food justice, transportation equity, the protection of civil rights in emergency planning, and the full range of environmental hazard protections for EJ communities are present in the San Diego region's collective efforts.

The OECJ mission statement summarizes its purpose and associated responsibilities:

The Office of Environmental and Climate Justice will prioritize and value the human health and well-being of the San Diego region through collaboration with our communities, neighboring jurisdictions, and other regional entities. OECJ will partner with environmental justice communities throughout the region to be responsive to their self-determined needs through meaningful engagement, while respecting community expertise and recognizing the racial injustices and historical disparities faced by them, now and for generations to come.



As the OECJ does not have regulator or enforcement authority, it will serve as a community advocate that liaises with departments within the County, as well as other regional, federal and State regulatory agencies. To do so, The OECJ will have the following roles and responsibilities:

- (1) Assist EJ communities throughout the region in building their capacity to address environmental and climate justice through collaboration, engagement and technical assistance;
- (2) Educate and improve the public's understanding of environmental health disparities, and develop effective means of communication of EJ issues more broadly;
- (3) Establish a collaborative regional working group that consists of local and regional enforcement agencies, as well as community-based organizations, that advances pollution exposure reductions and improved air quality, best practices, and identifies barriers and gaps to ensure environmental and climate justice practices throughout our region;
- (4) Provide input into the budgetary and policy-making process for County programs and services, and recommend policies that direct funding to EJ communities, in collaboration with the Office of Equity and Racial Justice;
- (5) Serve as an ombudsperson for community concerns on EJ issues within the unincorporated county and with other local and regional enforcement agencies to help them better understand the community concerns;
- (6) Identify and further refine criteria for EJ communities in the unincorporated areas of the County, working with the relevant stakeholders and the Planning & Development Services Department;
- (7) Support the formation of steering committees for EJ communities in the unincorporated areas of the County identified in the draft Environmental Justice element of the County's General Plan (North El Cajon, North Lemon Grove, Spring Valley, Sweetwater), where there is community desire for such a committee, and manage the committee(s) including setting meeting agendas, coordinating County departments, and capturing timely input on projects, plans and policies that impact the relevant EJ community;
- (8) Develop tools that support identifying and prioritizing EJ concerns in individual communities, strategic intervention, assessing cumulative impacts, and evaluating mitigation options;
- (9) Identify federal and State grants or funding opportunities to support the expansion of environmental and climate justice programs in the region, including climate investments and new opportunities for workforce and small-business development in a green economy;
- (10) Research community-scale vulnerability and resilience factors and cumulative risk of health disparities resulting from environmental and climate-change stressors such as extreme weather conditions, drought, flooding, or heat events.



IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

During the OECJ's first year of implementation, it will begin to fulfill its mission, roles and responsibilities in the following focus areas:

- A.** Create and support meaningful engagement opportunities for all EJ communities
- B.** Facilitate collaboration among public agencies and community-based organizations
- C.** Identify and promote federal and State funding opportunities
- D.** Build the capacity of EJ communities with the least representation



A. CREATE AND SUPPORT MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL EJ COMMUNITIES

Meaningful engagement opportunities for all EJ communities will involve conducting ongoing outreach and engagement that reaches environmental justice communities throughout the region. The OECJ must do so with clear explanations and accessible information that builds EJ communities' understanding in how to find help for environmental and climate related topics, and how community members can be involved in creating solutions. Issues and opportunities will vary by locations and needs of communities, requiring the OECJ to have a strong understanding of these differences. Partnerships with community-based organizations with close ties to EJ communities will be important to maximizing OECJ's effectiveness.

Community Focus

R = Region

U = Unincorporated County

	Year 1 Implementation Steps	R	U
A.1	Develop public information material that explains the role of OECJ in the region and how to request assistance with attention to accessibility, cultural, and language considerations (i.e., website, FAQ, contact information)	X	
A.2	Compile existing contacts and data regarding EJ-focused organizations throughout the region	X	
A.3	Create and conduct an outreach and engagement strategy targeting EJ communities throughout the region	X	
A.4	Engage communities that have been disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate impacts to be involved in the climate action planning and climate resiliency planning throughout the region	X	



B. FACILITATE COLLABORATION AMONG PUBLIC AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

Multiple, concurrent efforts that address environmental justice and climate justice issues and impacted communities will require collaboration with the support of OECJ to ensure that the voices of EJ communities are prioritized and duplicative efforts are avoided. Within County government, this will involve regular communication among all departments and groups to find ways to share resources, coordinate messages to the public, and be mutually-supportive in planning, programming, and service delivery. Across the region, OECJ will regularly engage with the full range of public agency and community-based partners that address issues and topics that cut across jurisdictional boundaries and involve multi-agency collaboration.

Community Focus

R = Region

U = Unincorporated County

	Year 1 Implementation Steps	R	U
B.1	Initiate participation in all environmental and climate related initiatives in the San Diego region to serve as a resource and partner (e.g., Regional Decarbonization Framework), including equitable mitigation of climate impacts and resiliency to climate disasters	X	
B.2	Establish and participate in a working group for the San Diego region for collaboration among internal County departments across the County enterprise and multi-jurisdictional partners to build a cohesive framework for tracking, reporting, and acting on cumulative impacts to EJ communities throughout the region	X	
B.3	Engage and initiate participation in community meetings and forums that are already taking place to ensure collaborative and threaded messaging and communication for communities	X	
B.4	Explore assisting other local agencies in reviewing projects to promote EJ issues	X	



C. IDENTIFY AND PROMOTE FEDERAL AND STATE FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

The OECJ will be the County government’s lead office in identifying federal and State grant or funding opportunities to support the expansion of environmental and climate justice programs, activities, and investments throughout the region. The OECJ will also lead or partner with other County departments, public agencies, and/or community-based organizations in pursuing these opportunities. Whenever possible, these opportunities will support innovative and collaborative solutions across inter-connected issue areas in environmental and climate justice, including but not limited to: emergency planning, infrastructure, transportation, public health, land use planning, and many more.

Community Focus

R = Region

U = Unincorporated County

	Year 1 Implementation Steps	R	U
C.1	Identify plan and project priorities addressing environmental and climate justice, including in the Climate Action Plan, within the County enterprise that a require external funding sources		X
C.2	Identify potential regional or multi-jurisdictional plan and project priorities, including in the Regional Decarbonization Framework, addressing environmental and climate justice in partnership with other agencies that require external funding sources	X	



D. BUILD THE CAPACITY OF EJ COMMUNITIES WITH THE LEAST REPRESENTATION

All EJ communities will benefit from the support of the OECJ, including those locations, neighborhoods, communities, and organizations that have the least capacity to address environmental and climate justice issues. The OECJ will identify these communities with the least representation to understand their critical issues and needs and to assist in developing strategies and resources to build their capacity. These efforts are anticipated to be primarily in the unincorporated communities which are known to lack organized, community-based organizations as compared to urban communities in the San Diego region.

Community Focus

R = Region

U = Unincorporated County

	Year 1 Implementation Steps	R	U
D.1	Support the formation of steering committees for EJ communities in the unincorporated areas of the County identified in the draft Environmental Justice element of the County's General Plan (North El Cajon, North Lemon Grove, Spring Valley, Sweetwater), where there is community desire for such a committee, and manage the committee(s) including setting meeting agendas, coordinating County departments, and capturing timely input on projects, plans and policies that impact the relevant EJ community		X
D.2	Support the County Environmental Justice Element project team in expanding criteria beyond State requirements for identifying EJ communities in unincorporated and rural communities		X
D.3	Collaborate with the County Office of Emergency Services to identify opportunities for enhanced emergency, disaster, hazard, and resiliency plans, operations, response, and recovery in EJ communities	X	

